

# CLOTHES ENCOUNTERS

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Names of businesses, especially small Mom-and-Pop ones, are a fertile source of wordplay. This is especially evident in beauty parlor and barbershop nomenclature, extensively documented in "Hair-It-Is" in the May 1979 *Word Ways*. This article is a sequel, concentrating on women's and men's clothing stores, including such specialties as maternity and bridal shops, but excluding shoes (more often dominated by large chains). The names in both articles are impressive testimony to the inventiveness of the human mind.

Almost all examples are drawn from the Yellow Pages of telephone directories in more than 100 cities in the United States (plus Toronto). Admittedly, the survey is incomplete; smaller towns are not included, and it is easy to overlook (or not even recognize) the isolated wordplay needle buried in a haystack of ho-hum names. Specific sources are identified if four or fewer examples were seen.

As in the earlier article, the wordplay is divided into three broad categories: rhyming wordplay, puns, and literary or musical allusions. Wordplay exists, however, outside these bounds. For example, the name *Madam Adam's* (Morris County) is a near-palindrome, as is *Denim Mine* (Salt Lake City), and the oxymoron is represented by *Definite Maybe* (Beverly Hills), *Classy Rags* (Tucson), and *Ritzy Rags* (San Diego). The desire to head the alphabet is clearly evidenced by *A.A. Aardvark and Company* (Orange County). Several establishments emphasize their nameless nature:

Noname Boutique (Monmouth County, Suburban Trenton)

Noname Fashions (Toronto)

Anonymous Corporation (Toronto)

The Unnameable (Los Angeles West)

Two names were unintentionally ambiguous: the *Old Mill Ladies Factory Outlet* (Camden, Syracuse), and the *White Men's Clothing and Tailors* (Chicago). I hope that segregation is not still being practiced in the Windy City!

This article does not discuss word coinages, principally manifested in melds of personal names. However, it is worth noting in passing the extensive use of the -(t)ique suffix: *Knitastique*, *Sportique*, *Mustique*, *Fashnique*, *Boatique*, *Mystique*, *Orientique*, *Bettique*, *Bridetique*, *Clothique*, *Amerique*, and *Sewtique*.

Rhyming wordplay is fairly common. Most rhymes are of the classic type, with only the initial consonant changing (cat/hat);

however, some alter the final consonant instead (cat/cap), or both ends of the word, leaving the vowel sound intact (ban/fat). Rarely, one also sees the inverse, with the initial and final consonants preserved (tip/top). All examples can be found below.

Rhymes can be made of the proprietor's name. However, such stores need not be restricted to clothing:

Lazy Daisy (Morris County)  
 Madam Adam's (Morris County)  
 Juicy Lucy (Cleveland)  
 Handy Andy (Pittsburgh)  
 Screamin' Mimi's (Providence)  
 Tracy's Place (Nassau County)  
 Ben's Men's Store (El Paso)

Alternatively, the type of clothing can be invoked, as in:

Slack Shack (Staten Island, Toronto)  
 Pants Pantry (Queens)  
 The Jean Scene (Columbus)  
 The Jean Machine (Salem OR)  
 The Top Shop (Chicago, Toronto)  
 Shirts First (Dallas)  
 The Blouse House (Los Angeles West)  
 The Better Sweater (Denver)  
 Tops to Socks, Tops 'N Socks (Nassau County, Denver)  
 Tweeds and Weeds (San Diego)

Special mention goes to **Black Slax** (Las Vegas), both a rhyme and a pun on blackjack, one of the games featured in the Nevada casinos. I'd love to see the **Bread 'N Thread** (Akron) store - does this sell both food and clothes? The best rhymes, and the rarest, are those which join a name (real or legendary) with merchandise (real or metaphorical):

Bud's Duds (Salt Lake City)  
 Doud's Duds (Dallas)  
 John's Jeans (Dallas)  
 Eve's Leaves (Birmingham, Sarasota)

Regrettably, no one seems to have discovered such names as Mitch's Britches, Ma's Bras, Ted's Threads, Jack's Slacks, Bert's Shirts, Tess's Dresses, Gene's Jeans, or Heather's Leathers!

Other stores make rhymes on their clientele:

Shady Lady (Dallas, Pasadena, Pittsburgh)  
 Sassy Lassy (Albuquerque, Pittsburgh)  
 Frilly Filly (Anchorage)  
 Petite Street (Baltimore)  
 Chubby and Tubby (Seattle)  
 Tall 'n Small Girl (Albuquerque)  
 Dad 'N Lad, Lad and Dad (Dallas, Nashville, Phoenix, Tampa)  
 Jock Shop (San Diego)  
 The Den for Men (Queens)

Some rhyming names allude to the quality or elegance of their

wares, or to their good value:

Elegant Elephant Maternity (Cleveland)  
 Dress for Success (Oakland)  
 Dress for Less (Cincinnati)  
 Twice as Nice (Albany, Cape Cod, Syracuse)  
 Fine Lines (San Francisco)  
 Fads 'n Clads (Louisville)  
 Sleek 'n Chic Shop (Birmingham)  
 Chic to Cheek (San Francisco)  
 Unique Boutique (Cleveland, Fort Lauderdale, Monmouth County)  
 A Nose for Clothes (Miami)  
 Rack-N-Stack (Monmouth County)  
 Snooty Hooty (Atlanta)  
 Svelte Veldt (San Antonio)  
 Classy Sassy (Bergen County)

But a few emphasize just the opposite:

The Rag Bag (Atlanta)  
 The Shack in the Back (Nassau County)

Puns, the second major source of clothing establishment nomenclature, come in a variety of forms - those that capitalize on the different meanings of a word, those that employ homonyms (such as the famous triple pun about the mother who told her cowboy offspring to name their ranch Focus - where the sons raise meat), and those that rely on near-homonyms (often the real groaners). All types can be found in the examples below.

Puns that focus on the names of the clientele for clothing shops might well be applied to many other personal-service businesses. The male/mail homonym is reflected in:

The Male Man (Augusta GA, Orange County, Toronto)  
 The Male Bag (Baltimore)  
 Male Call (Memphis)  
 US Male (Memphis)

For men, one has several shops called (The) Men's Room, and the correlative Ladies' Room Boutique (Ocean City) was also noted. Miss appears in the very common clothing chain Hit or Miss, but the name Ms Fit Clothing (Syracuse) appears to be less than felicitous. Still, it may be deliberate, in view of such names as:

The City Dump (Los Angeles West)  
 Bluebeard's (Oakland)  
 Kick in the Pants (Daytona Beach, Fort Lauderdale)  
 Poise N'lvy (Baton Rouge, Buffalo)  
 Bonnie and Clyde Fashions (San Antonio)  
 Mac the Knife (Seattle)  
 Bag Lady (Daytona Beach)  
 Bad Girls (Queens)  
 Bumpkins (Fort Lauderdale)  
 Mickey Finn (Boston, Fort Lauderdale)  
 Bum's Bumpers (Columbia SC)

Returning to the pun, made/maid is enshrined in Maid in Heaven

(Brooklyn, Westchester County), gal makes an appearance in Gal-Array (Morris County), a near-homonym of gallery, and Mom's The Word (Passaic County) graces a maternity shop.

Puns on the word **body** almost always take the form of (The) **Body Shop**, although **Busy Body** (Denver) and the clever **Body and Sole** (Fort Worth, Queens) were also found.

Many proprietors have noticed the close relationship between **wear**, a general synonym for clothing, and **warehouse**, the place where discount goods are often sold. There are many **warehouse** varieties, the word being modified by clothing, maternity, petite, gentlemen's, men's, women's, your, work, and design, as well as standing alone. Oddly, Atlanta has two establishments, one called **The Warehouse** and the other, **The Warehouse**.

Actually, the word **wear** can be punned in other ways:

Wear It's At (Passaic County)  
Wear Else (Boston, Fort Lauderdale, Manchester NH)  
Grin and Wear It (Cleveland)

**Clothes** itself comes in for its share of puns because of the near-homonyms **closed** and **close**:

Clothes Circuit (Chicago)  
Clothes to You (Allentown, Boston, Camden, Philadelphia)  
Clothes Out (many places)  
Clothes Call (Boston, Chester Nj, Tampa)  
Clothes Friends (Dallas)  
Clothes Quarters (Boston, Miami, Oakland, Ocean County)  
Clothes Enounters (many places)

There are many puns based on specific articles of dress:

London Britches (Rockland County)  
Above the Belt (Seattle)  
Shirt Tale(s) (Chicago, Manchester NH, San Diego, San Francisco)  
It Takes a Jeanius (Tampa)  
The Loungerie (Tampa)  
The Dress Circle (New Orleans, Pittsburgh)  
Suit Yourself (Phoenix, San Francisco, Suffolk County)  
Tie One On (Philadelphia)  
Pant Her (New Orleans)  
Smarty-Pants (many places)

Some skirt the edge of vulgarity or obscenity, most notably:

Sons of Britches (Las Vegas)  
Shirt House (San Francisco)  
The Brick Shirt House (Seattle, Toronto)  
Mother Frockers Maternity Wear (Fort Lauderdale)

Other terms related to clothing - fashion, material and trimmings, manufacturing techniques, fittings - can also be punned:

Fancy That (Charlotte)  
The Turnstyle (Dallas)

Haute Stuff (Minneapolis)  
 Fashionation (Boston, Columbus, Milwaukee)  
 Designs on You (Philadelphia)

The Frill Seekers (Toronto)  
 The Frill of it All (Rockland County)  
 Cotton Ginny (Toronto)  
 Wild and Woolly (Oakland)

And Sew On (Boulder)  
 Knit-Wit(s) (Beverly Hills, Camden, Philadelphia)  
 Knitstoyou (Nassau County)  
 In Stitches (Minneapolis)  
 Rags to Stitches (San Diego)  
 The Stitching Post (Phoenix)

A Fitting Place (Memphis)  
 Fit to be Tried (Tucson)

Three puns depend upon the shop offering second-hand clothing:

Penny Annie's (Kansas City)  
 Too Good to be Threw (San Antonio)  
 Re-Threads for Men (Dallas)

Puns for bridal shops are hard to come by; I noted only **The Wedding Belle** (Denver) and **(The) Bridal Sweet** (Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Providence). No one seems to have capitalized on the **bridal/bridle** homonym, even in horse country like Lexington, Kentucky. Puns for maternity shops are equally uncommon. In addition to two already mentioned, an outstanding pun exploits the **lode/load** homonym: **The Mother Lode** (Denver).

I noted only two shops whose names punned on their location: **Bandy Box** (Nashville) on Bandywood Drive, and **Catch in the Rye** (Westchester County) in Rye, New York.

A few shops employ psychological lingo: **The Hang-Up** (Cleveland) or **Hang-Ups** (Allentown), **The Great Put-On** (Las Vegas, Miami) or **Put-Ons** (San Fernando), and **The Great Cover-Up** (Cleveland).

Literary or musical allusions, the third source of clothing store names, come either in pure form or cleverly allied with puns. Examples of the former include:

Great Expectations (Harrisburg, Milwaukee, Oakland, Sub. Essex)  
 Ragtime (many places)  
 My Fair Lady (Akron, Cleveland)  
 Vanity Fair (Los Angeles)  
 H.M.S. Pinafore (Suburban Trenton)  
 The Stork Club (Salt Lake City)  
 Little Women (Pittsburgh, Tampa, Toronto)  
 A Man For All Seasons (San Francisco)  
 Tuxedo Junction (San Diego, Toronto)  
 Saratoga Trunk (Columbus)  
 Tiger Rags II (Denver)  
 Play (or Wear) It Again Sam (Dayton, Little Rock)

I find far more clever the store names that introduce a pun as well. Unfortunately, these are far rarer:

Georgia Girl (Atlanta)  
 The Happy Looker (or Hooper) (San Diego, Dayton)  
 Pantasia (Los Angeles Northeast)  
 My Flair Lady (Beverly Hills)  
 My Square Lady

The last, obtained from a newspaper article, refers to a shop specializing in square dance clothing. I watched in vain, especially in Texas, for The Best Little Wearhouse In Texas.

Of the many words used by clothing merchants, rag(s) is surprisingly popular. Several have already been noted; here is a complete round-up:

Glad Rags (many places)  
 Mr. Rags (Olympia, Salem OR, Seattle)  
 Rags for Dolls (Dallas)  
 Ragtime (many places)  
 Rag Bag, Rags and Bags (Atlanta, Des Moines)  
 Riches and Rags, Rags to Riches (Bergen County, Cincinnati)  
 Rags to Stitches (San Diego)  
 The Rag Pickers (Tampa)  
 Classy Rags (Tucson)  
 Ritzy Rags (San Diego)  
 Ragsmatazz (San Francisco)  
 The Industrial Rag Company (Los Angeles West)  
 Tiger Rags II (Denver)  
 Rags Clothing Elements (Annapolis)  
 Rag Street (Los Angeles)  
 Happiness is a New Rag (Orange County)

In closing, I offer two names for someone who wants to open a combination beauty parlor and clothing outlet: Heads 'n Threads, and From Hair to Maternity. The only real-life shop of this nature is, apparently, Olga's Tress 'n Dress (Cleveland) - one-stop service for the busy woman!

#### QUERY

*A library patron of the Bay Area Reference Center in San Francisco desires a dictionary definition for the word "elo", which he recalls seeing in a dictionary in 1948 with a definition "the ultimate extension of one's aims". Can any Word Ways reader come up with a specific reference to this word?*